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**March 26, 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DISBARRED LAWYER PLEADS GUILTY
TO BANKRUPTCY FRAUD CHARGES**

GREENBELT, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that Bridgette M. Harris, age 45, of Bowie, Maryland, a former bankruptcy lawyer, pleaded guilty today before United States District Judge Peter J. Messitte to four counts of bankruptcy fraud and fraudulent transfer of property in bankruptcy.

In a Statement of Facts provided to the court as part of the plea agreement, Harris admitted that she practiced bankruptcy law in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. In June 1999, the bankruptcy court in Alexandria, Virginia barred her from practice before that court, and the bankruptcy court in Greenbelt suspended her right to practice before that court. The Maryland suspension order cited “a course of continuing conduct by [Harris] of misfeasance and nonfeasance observed by Judges of this court” which “appeared to put her clients’ affairs in jeopardy.” The Maryland federal district court and other courts in the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania and Virginia also entered orders which suspended Harris from the practice of law and required her to disgorge fees paid by certain former clients.

Harris acknowledged that during 2000, she devised a scheme to defraud the Maryland bankruptcy court and clients when, despite her suspensions, she continued to solicit clients, request and receive fees, and file cases in the Maryland bankruptcy court. Harris is alleged to have filed bankruptcy petitions which omitted the client's true address and substituted her address in order to improperly bring the cases in the Greenbelt court, and that she concealed her role in the cases by causing clients to file the petitions pro se or by filing the petitions in the name of another attorney, without the permission and knowledge of such attorney.

Harris also admitted to devising a separate scheme in which, because she was subject to a substantial judgment for legal malpractice held by Maryland creditors, she filed her own personal bankruptcy petition in the bankruptcy court in Brooklyn, New York. During that proceeding, Harris made numerous false statements under oath, including false representations about her social security number, address, income, personal property, and debts. During the proceedings, Harris presented altered documents, and made telephone calls to the Chapter 7 trustee falsely identifying herself as a representative of the NAACP, a judge, and judicial law clerk. After the case was transferred to the bankruptcy court in Maryland, Harris fraudulently transferred two parcels of real estate belonging to the bankruptcy estate by executing quitclaim deeds which transferred the properties to relatives. The documents contained false representations about Harris's family members and contained a forged signature of the attorney who supposedly prepared them.

In the Statement of Facts, Harris also admitted that in 2002, she solicited bankruptcy clients under the business name "Foreclosure Prevention Network" whose advertisements stated in part, "The Foreclosure Prevention Network/Save your Home From Foreclosure – Your Auction Has Been

Scheduled/Free/Foreclosure Prevention Networking Services in Maryland, DC and Virginia/1-877-KEEP YOUR HOME....” Harris subscribed to this phone number; solicited bankruptcy clients; caused agents to meet with potential bankruptcy clients and obtained fees from them; and prepared and caused to be filed bankruptcy petitions for clients which indicated that the attorney for the debtor was an attorney in Landover, Maryland, without the attorney’s knowledge or consent.

Harris faces a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, three years of supervised release, and a \$100 special assessment fee. The sentencing court can also order Harris to pay restitution. Judge Messitte has scheduled sentencing for June 13, 2004 at 9:30 a.m. Harris remains released under supervision of Pretrial Services pending sentencing.

The case is a result of an investigation conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation following a criminal referral from the Office of the United States Trustee. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stuart A. Berman and Michael Leotta.